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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF FURNITURE.



UR readers will, we feel sure, thank us for calling their attention to a new work entitled "Illustrated History of Furniture," which has just been published simultaneously in England and the United States, which is undoubtedly the most comprehensive work hitherto published on the important subject to which it refers. A work of this kind has long been wanted in this country, and the present volume covers the entire field of furniture from the earliest biblical references to the most modern productions of the cabinet maker. The author, Mr. Litchfield, who belongs to an old established furniture firm of wide fame in London, has had every opportunity of gaining valuable information, not only from his own ever-changing stock, but also from the specimens treasured in the museums of the wealthy, or disposed of in the great salesrooms of London and Paris, which he has personally investigated. This knowledge Mr. Litchfield has turned to account in his Illustrated History of Furniture. It is a volume of reliable facts culled from a thousand sources, and being excellently illustrated with the choicest specimens of furniture of all ages, it is worthy, not only of a place on the private library of the man of culture, but an indispensable volume to the furniture designer and to all who are interested in the manufacture and sale of decorative furniture and woodwork.

The descriptions, including the illustrations which accompany them, are explanatory of the historical and social changes which have directly or indirectly influenced the furniture of different nations, arranged in chronological order. The book, therefore, is a panorama of the art of furniture in its widest sense, and no modern decorator can afford to be without so interesting a volume, which presents at a glance information which to him is of peculiar interest.

The first chapter refers to ancient furniture, which covers a period of several centuries, the illustrations exhibiting the high degree of art which was applied to household surroundings by the Assyrians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans.

The second chapter illustrates and describes the interiors of the middle ages, and the attention of the reader is attracted to the state chairs, buffets, chests and architectural carvings still extant in England, France, Germany and other countries.

The third chapter describes and illustrates that great art revival in Europe known as the period of the Renaissance, the author describing separately and in detail the enrichments produced by the Renaissance in Italy, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany and England. Numerous historical pieces of furniture carvings and panels, such as the screens of the Charterhouse in Gray's Inn, the Great Bed of Ware, Shakespeare's chair, etc., being illustrated.

The fourth chapter deals with a period of about one hundred and fifty years, from the time of King James I. to the time of Chippendale and his contemporaries, which may be styled the Jacobean period in furniture. Illustrations show the style of cabinet work under the Stuarts, Cromwell, and during the Restoration, exhibiting refinement of design, soundness of construction and thorough workmanship. Flemish and Dutch influence made itself felt in the time of William III., and continued to the Queen Anne period, both periods being famous for their sideboards, cabinets, cupboards, grandfather clocks and other kinds of homely and practical furniture.

The fifth chapter describes in brief the furniture of Eastern countries, including China, Japan, India, Persia and Arabia. Reference is made to the Japanese cabinets in lacquer work, the thrones of the moguls, doors of carved sandal wood, Persian incense burners in engraved brass, and Saracenic woodwork from Cairo and Damascus.

The sixth chapter discusses French furniture as represented in the styles of Louis XIV., Louis XV. and Louis XVI., and Marie Antoinette, passing in review the work of artists and cabinet makers who made their mark during this period of the greatest luxury and extravagant refinement. The influence of painters like Lebrun, Watteau, Lancret, Boucher on the general design and decoration of artistic furniture is demonstrated, and the respective merits of the various methods of ornamentation,

such as Boulle's tortoiseshell veneers and ormolu castings, Vernis Martin and lacquer work, Caffieri's and Gouthière's chiseled mountings, inlays of Sèvres plaques and Riesener's marqueterie, are described and illustrated by specimens preserved in the Jones collection at South Kensington and in other collections in England and France.

The seventh chapter treats of Chippendale and his contemporaries, a period originated by Sir William Chambers, the architect of Somerset House, whose ideas were applied and further developed by the Brothers Adam, Gillow and others, all of them influenced more or less by decorative suggestions by Pergolesi, Cipriani, Angelica Kaufman and Josiah Wedgwood. Mr. Litchfield's account of Thomas Chippendale's and Sheraton's cabinet work is most interesting and instructive, the author pointing out that the former's designs are very different from those popularly ascribed to him, as can be plainly proved from Chippendale's famous book "The Gentleman and Cabinet Makers' Director," which contains over two hundred engravings of every description of furniture. Several other books of designs for household and art furniture were published towards the end of the last century, amongst others by W. Ince and J. Mayhew, by Thomas Sheraton, Shearer and Heppelwhite, all skillful cabinet makers, which receive due praise from the author, while numerous reproductions from these books show the more or less original style of the various makers, and form an excellent guide for the student, collector and possessors of eighteenth century English furniture, which was then and is now held in high esteem in the country of its origin and abroad.

The concluding chapters, eight and nine, are appropriated to the history of the furniture which was produced during the first half of the nineteenth century, and from the great exhibition in 1851 to the present time. The Empire style, which was introduced in France with the advent of Napoleon I., took its characteristic features from classic designs, and English cabinet makers, including Sheraton, George Smith and others, were influenced by this tendency. The fashion, however, went out when monarchy was reestablished, and for some time the scrolls and curves of the Louis Quinze period were revived, until the French Baroque style came in, which prevailed under William IV., of England, and during the early part of the Victorian Era, and was but slightly affected by Pugin's attempt to apply Gothic ornament to furniture.

During this period English designers and craftsmen, with but a few exceptions, seemed to have lost their originality of conception and initiative, until a new impetus was given to the industrial arts of that country by the great Exhibition in 1851, where all the prominent manufacturers of furniture were represented. Eminent firms like Jackson and Graham, Wright and Mansfield, Collinson and Lock and individual artists like H. Rogers, the wood carver came to the fore, and with others, raised the standard of English cabinet work to the position it at present occupies. Mr. Litchfield traces the influence of subsequent international exhibitions, and also of the Arts and Crafts, and of the Home Arts and Industries Association, and elucidates his remarks by a great many well selected illustrations. To enter into further details want of space forbids, and we must leave it to our readers to make themselves fully acquainted with the contents of this excellent book, which they will find to be a mine of information on the subject it treats, and which can be acquired at an exceptionally reasonable price.

To give an idea of the illustrations on the work we reproduce the illustration of an English satinwood dressing table with painted decoration, the product of the latter part of the eighteenth century; also a sideboard in mahogany with inlay of satin-wood in the style of Robert Adam. The parlor chairs by Chippendale are very characteristic specimens of this well known artist's work.

The work is published by Estes & Lauriat, of Boston, and is limited to an edition of 200 copies for the United States, each copy of which will be specially numbered. It is Imperial octavo in size, handsomely bound in cloth, full gold, containing 200 illustrations.

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